



NEW COVENANT COMMUNITY

Leviticus 16

If you have Bible, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to Leviticus 16. I am so thankful for how Pastor Jim helped us see the biblical, theological, and practical importance of this book last week ... and I just want to pick up where he left off in the first seven chapters of Leviticus to consider what happens next, particularly in these last seven chapter that we've read.

Now Leviticus 10 through 17, admittedly, have been some baffling chapters to read through. How do we process through this? Chapter 10 ... two priests are struck down dead. Chapter 11 ... we read laws like verses 7-8: *"And the pig, because it parts the hoof and is cloven-footed but does not chew the cud, is unclean to you. You shall not eat any of their flesh, and you shall not touch their carcasses; they are unclean to you."* We read this, and we think, "What does this mean? What does this mean for us in Birmingham ... no pig? No pork? Is this a law against Jim 'N Nicks for lunch?"

Then you've got Chapter 12 ... laws for purification after childbirth. Chapter 13 ... laws regarding leprosy and other skin ailments. Any man with a receding hair line gets good news in verse 40: *"If a man's hair falls out from his head, he is bald ..."* but, *"he is clean."* Then you get to Chapter 14, and you've got instructions for cleaning house that include the blood of a bird, cedar wood, scarlet yarn, and hyssop ... not sure how many of us have these supplies in our cleaning closets.

But we read all this, and we think, "God, why have you given us this book? Why have you given us all these details? It's a little too much information at some points, isn't it? It's kind of tough to explain to the kids in family worship."

So what I want to do, as we're now a little over halfway through this book, is to give you a couple of truths to remember ... then a few tips on reading through the rest of this book ... and then, I want to tie all of this back to making disciples through small groups. I never imagined preaching about small groups from Leviticus, but ... the more I looked at these texts in light of what we're walking through as a church, the more I saw some really clear parallels between what God was doing in Israel in Leviticus and what God is doing at Brook Hills right now. So I want to do all of that, and then, I want to lead us in a concentrated time of prayer at the end of our time together ... which we'll get to.

Two Truths to Consider ...

These Old Testament laws represent God's covenant relationship with His people.

Now in order to get to that, we're going to move pretty quickly, so let's jump in with two truths to consider when reading Leviticus. First, these Old Testament laws represent God's covenant relationship with his people. Remember that the word testament is another word for covenant. God introduced this way back in Exodus 19 when he said, "*If you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples ...*" (Exodus 19:5). And then he promised blessing to them in response to their obedience to the law. Now this is huge, because if we're not careful, we can see these laws as a group of arbitrary, even annoying, regulations that people had to live by. But that's not the picture the Old Testament is giving us. Instead, it's a testament—it's a covenant relationship—and these laws are a gift from God to his people where he spells out clearly how they can best love him and love each other.

Think for a second about your own home. Any good parent will give their children instructions on how to live in the home. And these aren't just arbitrary limitations on behavior. These are real expressions of love ... you want your kids to know how to live in a way that is best for them—for their relationships with each other, and their relationship with you.

In this way, laws, instructions, guidelines, rules are really good. So just remember as you read here, "This is a good Father who is giving good instructions to his children because he loves them and knows far better than they do what is best for them."

Now, in saying that, I also want to point out that these Old Testament laws are not our testament laws. So we in this room are not Old Testament Israel. We are the New Testament church. And while there is continuity we have with Old Testament Israel in many ways, we don't relate to God under the same covenant that they did. Our covenant relationship with God is different than their covenant relationship with God. We live under a new covenant (based on the New Testament), and what this means, then, is that unless an Old Testament law is somehow restated or reinforced in the New Testament, it is no longer directly binding on God's people.

So you see many of these ritual laws in Leviticus that describe various offerings ... or you see various civil laws with prescribed punishments ... you see many of them here in Leviticus, and then you don't ever see most of them again in the New Testament. And when that's the case, you know that they are not binding on the New Testament (new covenant) people of God.

At the same time, there are some laws that are clearly reinforced. The most glaring example is in Leviticus 19, when the law will say, "*You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself ...*" (Leviticus 19:18). We know that Jesus says in Matthew 22:37-40 that all the law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments: love God with all your heart (which is from Deuteronomy 6:5), and love your neighbor as yourself (which is from Leviticus 19:18). So we know those are not just laws for them ... those are laws for us. And there are other laws like that. The Ten Commandments in the Old Testament are restated and reinforced in different ways in the New Testament. In Matthew 5, Jesus "ratchets up" various laws, in a sense, to a whole new level.

But it's not just in the Gospels. You think about Old Testament laws that are in much discussion today, like laws concerning homosexuality. Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 both forbid males lying with males and females lying with females, and a common argument is that this was just Old Testament law, and we should treat them the same way as we do any other Old Testament law, not applying them to today. But places like Romans 1 and 1 Corinthians 6, in the New Testament, make crystal clear that God forbids homosexuality in the new covenant, as well.

So when an Old Testament law is restated or reinforced in the New Testament, we know that it is binding on God's people. But when it's not in some way restated or reinforced, then we see it only as a part of the Old Testament law.

These Old Testament laws are the Word of God for us even though they are not commands to us.

Now that leads some to think, "Then why are we reading all these laws? What's the point?" And that's where I want to remind you that these Old Testament laws are the Word of God for us even though they may not be the commands of God to us. So just because a law is a part of the old covenant and not the new covenant doesn't mean that it has no value. Every single one of these laws plays a significant part in God's story, which is ultimately our story.

The New Testament is clear in places like Galatians 3 that the law is intended to lead us to know, understand, and trust in Christ, who was the fulfillment of all the law. That's exactly what Jim showed us last week. While not all these specific laws are our laws, they still teach us much about how God relates to his people.

Three Pieces of Counsel ...

Read the Old Testament laws carefully within their context.

This leads to the three pieces of counsel I want to give you as you finish reading Leviticus. One, read these Old Testament laws carefully within their context. Much of these laws seem foreign to us because their context is foreign to ours. Things in the wilderness a couple of thousand years ago among the Israelites looked differently than they do in twenty-first century Birmingham. And many of these laws make a lot more sense within their context.

For example, we've read laws that forbid boiling a young goat in its mother's milk (Exodus 34:26). And you and I might think, "What's so wrong with that?" But we would realize what's wrong if we knew that the Canaanites believed in magic, thinking that boiling a goat kid in its mother's milk would magically ensure fertility in that flock of goats. So this law was established by God to make sure that his people wouldn't adopt the magical traditions of their pagan neighbors. So that's just one small example of how context helps us to see this is no random, arbitrary law, but a crucial, beneficial law for God's people.

Now whenever you and I read these passages, we're not going to know all this context, but even if you don't know the context, hopefully it will be helpful to remember that there is a context very different from ours behind it that makes every single one of these laws important.

Observe what these Old Testament laws reveal about the gospel of God.

Second, observe what these Old Testament laws reveal about the gospel of God. If nothing else, all these laws about what is clean and unclean remind us of the holiness of God. He is absolutely pure, completely clean, and there is no defilement whatsoever in him. And he's

not just holy; he's gracious ... giving his people his Word, not leaving them to wander around in this world on their own. As we'll see in a minute, he's merciful, making a way once a year for the people's sin to be covered over. So we're learning about the gospel here.

Imagine the effects of these Old Testament laws collectively within a community.

And finally, imagine the effects of these Old Testament laws collectively within a community. So we're reading these laws and we're usually thinking, "Okay, how does this apply to my life?" But these were laws that weren't just given to individuals. These laws were given to a people—an entire community—to form how they would relate to God *and* one another. You and I can skim through some of these ritual cleanliness laws, thinking, "What's the point?" Remember that the people of Israel didn't have modern medicine, antibiotics.

This is exactly what I saw in Nepal a few weeks ago—where small health problems can turn into major diseases, and not just in one person's life, but in an entire village. So you think about a camp of a couple of million people in the wilderness ... one infection can end up harming thousands, if not tens of thousands, of lives. So this is not God being OCD about cleanliness among his people ... instead, he's taking care of his people ... while also telling them how they can best display his character, his holiness, his love, and his mercy to the nations around them, both in their wandering and when they would settle in the promised land.

And *this* is why I believe what we're reading in Leviticus has huge implications for what we're talking about in small groups. God has given us his Word in the New Testament (new covenant) for the same purpose: to take care of us ... and to tell us how we, together, can best display his character, his holiness, his love, and his mercy to our neighbors and the nations around us. And even though not every single one of these laws are our laws, there are clear implications that we can draw here as the community of God's people in the new covenant based on the community of God's people in the old covenant.

Four Implications for the Church ...

So what I want us to do is to read Leviticus 16, which is really the pivotal chapter in the book of Leviticus, describing the Day of Atonement, and I want us to consider, based on this chapter four implications for the church today, and specifically for The Church at Brook Hills, as we consider our community with one another in small groups.

Let's start in verse 1 of this chapter that describes an offering that would take place once a year to make atonement for all the people's sins.

The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near before the LORD and died, and the LORD said to Moses, "Tell Aaron your brother not to come at any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat that is on the ark, so that he may not die. For I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat. But in this way Aaron shall come into the Holy Place: with a bull from the herd for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering." (Leviticus 16:1-3)

Alright, let's pause at this point and consider this first implication for the church as God's people today ... and specifically for the church in this room.

We stand in awe together before the God who reigns over us.

One, we stand in awe together before the God who reigns over us. Leviticus 16 begins with a reference to Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, who died when they approached the Lord in an improper manner. This happened back in Leviticus 10 when they gave an unauthorized offering before the Lord—in other words, they decided one day to worship God in their own way. And the result? God brought fire out from the altar and consumed them both dead ... immediately. They were flippant before God, and it cost them their lives.

So here is a place where we're reading about offerings that don't apply to us ... so these are not God's words directly to us about how we are to give offerings ... but this is God's Word directly for us as reminder to us that, Church at Brook Hills, we cannot be a casual community before God.

It is a serious thing to worship God. This whole chapter involves instructions for one day of worship in the entire year—the Day of Atonement—the one day when one man amidst all the Israelites can enter into the Most Holy Place before God on behalf of the people. And that priest, Aaron here, was not to do this lightly.

This entire chapter is set up to evoke awe in the people of God as they consider the presence of God ... and in this way, it's a reminder to you and to me that it is a serious thing to gather together for the worship of God. We cannot be a casual community before God; we must be a contrite community before God.

So this warning is how Leviticus 16 begins; then look at how it ends.

"And it shall be a statute to you forever that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict yourselves and shall do no work, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you. For on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you. You shall be clean before the LORD from all your sins. It is a Sabbath of solemn rest to you, and you shall afflict yourselves; it is a statute forever." (Leviticus 16:29-31)

When it says you must afflict yourselves, it means that you must deny yourselves. The word literally means to oppress or to humble yourselves. Many people think this is a reference to fasting, and it may be, but regardless, the picture is clear. Worship necessitates humility.

And we see this throughout the rest of the Old Testament. Think of Ezra falling on his knees with his hands spread out saying (paraphrased), "I am too ashamed and disgraced to even lift up my face" (Ezra 9:6). It's the people of God in Nehemiah falling down on their faces in worship (Nehemiah 8:6). It's Isaiah 6 as Isaiah cries out in brokenness, "*Woe is me!*" (v. 5).

You don't worship God casually, and you don't worship God proudly. It's impossible. We are humbled, deeply humbled, afflicted in this sense, before God.

So I pray that when we gather together, both in this room and in our small groups, that there would be a weighty sense of what we're doing. We've gathered together in this room to worship God.

I was preaching last week at a conference, and I was preparing to pray before I began, and I was just overwhelmed with how casually we can approach God if we're not careful. Whether it's singing or when someone's praying, we all have this tendency to let our minds wander, don't we? And within seconds of starting to sing a song, or within seconds of someone praying, hundreds of us in this room can start thinking about different things ...

details of our day and things we need to do, where we're going to eat, whatever it is ... just a myriad of thoughts around this room. And in a matter of seconds, if we're not careful, there can be this perfunctory singing or praying going on in this place while all of heaven is shouting, "Do you realize WHO you're singing to?"

Do you realize WHO you're speaking to? You're speaking to GOD! 2,000 of you at one time ... speaking, singing to GOD ... and he is listening to you. Sure, he's upholding Mars at the same time, in addition to trillions of stars that he knows by name and 7.2 billion people on the planet for whom he's sustaining their every organ right now ... but you have GOD's attention in this gathering. So don't let your mind wander! Don't treat worship and prayer casually. Come before him contritely ... with your attention and your affections engaged ... afflicting yourselves.

Part of what it means to be the people of God is to stand in awe of the God who reigns over us. Are you in awe of the fact that we're even studying the Word of God right now? This is an awesome thing. May we not be casual with it. May we be contrite before him.

We fight in battle together against the sin that remains within us.

Second, as the church, we fight in battle together against the sin that remains within us. So the instructions we just read set up this offering for sin in Leviticus 16. It's the culmination, in a sense, of all the offerings that we looked at last week from the first part of Leviticus. Now as I was thinking about all these offerings for sin, and considering what we're talking about this morning, the glaring reality came to the forefront. Our propensity to sin is strong.

This is clear in Leviticus ... and this clear in every one of our lives. We are all prone to sin ... to disobey the law of God ... which is why we not only need the mercy of God (which we're about to talk about), but we need community with one another.

Think about this—because of our propensity to sin is strong ... we need help from one another.

We need brothers and sisters in community who know what's going in our lives and who help guard against sinful tendencies within us. There are two brothers in my life who I meet with on a regular basis (weekly when our schedules allow it), and we fill out what's basically an "Accountability Sheet," where we write down answers to questions like:

- How is your overall strength in life and ministry?
- How well have you loved your wife and your kids this last week?
- On a scale of 1-9, how would you assess your consistency in satisfying personal devotions?
- How would you assess your battle against ungodly thoughts (unbelief, bitterness, resentment, lust, pride, self-righteousness, cynicism, jealousy, covetousness, etc.)?
- Have you been with another person in a way that could be viewed as compromising?
- Have you viewed anything inappropriate?
- What Scripture have you memorized?
- Who have you shared the gospel with and how did it go?
- How can we pray for you?

We started doing this a year or so ago, and I don't know why I wasn't doing anything that intentional before. I need this in my life. I know myself too well ... I need brothers who are helping me in the fight against sin on a daily/weekly basis. And I don't believe there's a Christian in this room who doesn't need the same thing—maybe not the same accountability

sheet necessarily, but something like this—brothers or sisters who know your life ... your struggles ... your besetting sins.

Do you have that? This is part of the purpose of small groups. When you think small groups, don't just think class that someone teaches ... this is so much more than that. These are people that you're sharing life with ... and fighting the battle against sin alongside.

Why? Because you know, not only is our propensity to sin strong, but the punishment for sin is severe.

This is evident all across Leviticus. Nadab and Abihu offer one unauthorized offering, and they die. But it's not just them. In Leviticus: the punishment for adultery is death; the punishment for blasphemy is stoning. Sin is serious before God.

Now again, those particular punishments are not prescribed in the New Testament. We're obviously told not to commit adultery or blaspheme, but the punishments aren't the same.

But does that mean we should be any more casual about these things? No, we as a community of faith—a faith family—must realize the seriousness and severity of sin in our own lives and in others' lives—for when we do, we'll realize that we don't just *need* help from one another we want help from one another.

Sin has serious ramifications in all of our lives and all of our families ... all over the church. So in order to guard against the consequences of sin, we come together in biblical community ... praying for one another, warning one another, confronting one another, restoring one another ... because we love one another. And we love the glory of God.

Part of the purpose of biblical community is to fight in battle together against the sin that remains in our lives. So who are you fighting that battle with? If you are fighting it alone, apart from consistent community, you are in a very dangerous place spiritually. Which is why we call every member of this church to be in a small group of brothers and sisters who are fighting against sin alongside one another.

We unite together around the cross of Christ.

That then brings us to the third implication for the church: we unite together around the cross of Christ. So how could God's people, in their propensity to sin and in light of the punishment of sin, dwell in God's presence? And the answer came ultimately in the offering that's described here in Leviticus 16 on the Day of Atonement. God's provision for sin in the Old Testament revolved around: An annual sacrifice on the Day of Atonement.

That word atonement means "to cover," so this is a picture of how the sins of God's people were covered over so that they could be—look at the word—"at one" with God. This is how it would be possible for a sinful, unholy people to be "at one"—united with, in fellowship with—a sinless, holy God.

And this is how the sacrifice on that day would work. First, you had a priest who went enter into the Holy of Holies. Let's read about it here in (Leviticus 16) verses 4 and 5 ...

He shall put on the holy linen coat and shall have the linen undergarment on his body, and he shall tie the linen sash around his waist, and wear the linen turban; these are the holy garments. He shall bathe his body in water and then put them on. And he shall take from the congregation of the people of Israel two male goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering.

So Aaron, the high priest, according to verse 4 here, was to change his clothes, wash and purify himself, and then enter the presence of God on behalf of all the people. Now verse 6 says, "Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering for himself and shall make atonement for himself and for his house." So he'll take a bull as a sacrifice for his own sin, and then, starting in verse 7...

"Then he shall take the two goats and set them before the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting. And Aaron shall cast lots over the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for Azazel. And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the LORD and use it as a sin offering, but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the LORD to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel.

"Aaron shall present the bull as a sin offering for himself, and shall make atonement for himself and for his house. He shall kill the bull as a sin offering for himself. And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar before the LORD, and two handfuls of sweet incense beaten small, and he shall bring it inside the veil and put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is over the testimony, so that he does not die. And he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the front of the mercy seat on the east side, and in front of the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times.

"Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it over the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. Thus he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel and because of their transgressions, all their sins. And so he shall do for the tent of meeting, which dwells with them in the midst of their uncleannesses. No one may be in the tent of meeting from the time he enters to make atonement in the Holy Place until he comes out and has made atonement for himself and for his house and for all the assembly of Israel."
(vv. 7-17)

So Aaron, the high priest, sacrifices a bull as an offering to atone for his own sins—and then a goat as an offering to atone for the people's sins. The way he does this is he sprinkles blood over what's called the mercy seat.

So imagine the picture inside the holy of holies. You have God's law in the middle ... a law had obviously been broken by the people of God. So Aaron enters in, and there's a cover over the law—the atonement cover—what's called the mercy seat, here—and he sprinkles blood over the atonement cover. And this was a clear picture of how God saw the sins of Israel. Their transgressions against his law. But when God looked down on that law that had been broken, he would see blood ... a picture of the payment due sin—death.

And in this way God was satisfied by the sacrifice of a substitute. The purpose of the blood sacrifice was to atone for (cover over) the people's sin. So the payment for sin (death) was poured out, and the sins of God's people were covered over. And this is how the priest would make atonement for the people of God.

Then what he would do is he would take the other goat that was still alive, and listen to (Leviticus 16) verses 20-22 ...

"And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness."

He would symbolically lay his hands on that goat to represent the sins of the people passed over to this animal, and that goat would be released into the wilderness, never to be seen again, as a picture of God's forgiveness for his people's sin. A powerful picture—the sins of the Israelites have been removed, never to visit them again.

The only problem was—like Jim talked about last week—it was a sacrifice that would need repeating every single year. Year after year after year, they would do this. Because people still had sin, their hearts were still sinful. And one priest would serve in this capacity for however many years, but then he would die. And another priest and another priest and another priest in the history of Israel would represent the people of God before the presence of God to atone for the people's sins. And this continued year after year in Israel's history throughout the old covenant until you get to God's provision in the New Testament: An abiding sacrifice in the death of Christ.

So we went to Hebrews 10 last week. Go to Hebrews 9 with me this week. Hebrews 9:11-14:

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

So how did this happen? Well here, it's not a priest entering an earthly sanctuary, but a priest entering a heavenly sanctuary. Check out Hebrews 9:23-24:

Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.

Jesus didn't enter into the Holy of Holies in an earthly tabernacle, which was a copy of a heavenly reality. He entered into the heavenly reality itself—the very presence of God. And what was put on the altar there? His own blood.

Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, for then he would have had to

suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. (Hebrews 9:25-26)

Remember how the priest had to start by offering sacrifices for his own sins? Not so with Jesus. Hebrews 4 says he was without sin, and therefore he had no need for a sacrifice on his behalf. So instead, he himself became the sacrifice.

So here's the picture. God sees the sins in our lives. When he looks down on your heart and my heart, he sees that his law has been broken. We have sinned against him—all of us have. But when you and I put our faith, our trust, in the death of Christ on our behalf ... when our hearts are sprinkled in this way by the blood he has shed for our sins ...

Then when God sees the sin in our lives, God is satisfied by the sacrifice of his Son. Ladies and gentlemen, the only way you and I can stand before the presence of a holy God is if our sin is covered by the blood of Christ. And this is what unites us together ... the blood of Christ that was shed on a cross two thousand years ago.

Oh, we enter into this holy week today where we remember when Jesus entered into Jerusalem at the time of sacrifice, unbeknownst to the crowds around him, to become the sacrifice for their sins ... and for our sins. What we celebrate this Good Friday is the God of the universe pouring out the punishment for sin (death) upon his Son so that you can I could be at one (alive) with him.

And look at the implications of that—Hebrews 10—we'll skip the verses we read last week so as not to repeat them. Start in verse 19 ...

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (vv. 19-22)

Do you see the effects of Christ's sacrifice for all who have trusted in him? Our guilt is gone. Our guilt before God is gone. Your guilt before God is gone! And our conscience is clear. By the sacrifice of Christ, we are sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. "*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*" (Romans 8:1). We are welcomed into the presence of God by, and because of, the blood of Christ.

So, continuing in Hebrews 10 ...

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (vv. 23-25)

Do you see the implications for community? Let's spur one another on then. Let's meet together, fellowship with one another, and guard one another against sin, which is what verses 26-31 talk about. Leading to verse 32—where we see exhortations to God's people. They were increasingly facing suffering for spreading the gospel in the first century, and

part of the point of Hebrews is to call the people of God to continue on in the mission of Christ, proclaiming the good news of what he has done no matter what it costs them.

But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. For,

*"Yet a little while,
and the coming one will come and will not delay;
but my righteous one shall live by faith,
and if he shrinks back,
my soul has no pleasure in him."*

But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls. (Hebrews 10:32-39)

We work together in the mission of God.

Don't shrink back ... press on. Fourth implication for our community: we work together in the mission of God. United together by the cross of Christ, we work together in the mission of God. Make the connection: Leviticus—old covenant, Christ—new covenant ...

We want to show God's law through the way we share our lives. God has made us one with him through the blood of Christ. He has given us his law in the New Testament—his Word that describes how we are to live before him and with one another—in a way that, just like we saw in the old covenant, reflects his character and his love and his holiness and his mercy to the world around us.

This is why we don't just gather together in this room once a week, but why we share our lives with one another all week long ... why we are in close community with one another—in small groups like the one you saw earlier—so that people might see the effects of God's good law in the way we share our lives together. This is what we see in the New Testament church—when people saw the way the church shared life with each other, people were drawn to Christ. We don't accomplish mission all on our own; we accomplish mission in the context of community.

Together, we want to show God's law through the way we share our lives, and together we want to spread God's gospel for the sake of God's glory. There are people all around us in Birmingham and peoples all around us in the world—family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers—who, when God looks at their lives, he sees the sin of their hearts. And because they have not trusted in Christ, the punishment for their sin is their death ... eternal, everlasting death.

But you and I know that Christ has paid the price for that sin. Jesus has made a way for them to be at one with God. So Christians don't settle for just sitting in a seat on a Sunday for worship and staying on the sidelines as spectators every other day in the week. No ... we gather together on Sunday in awe of the God who has saved us, and we gather together in small groups where we battle against sin within us. We remind one another of the blood of Christ shed on the cross that unites us—that has covered our sin and cleansed our

consciences, removed our guilt ... and then we lock arms together, every week, going into the world to share our lives and to spread the gospel so that more and more and more people can be one with God.

This is what we do. This is what it means to be the church ... and this is what it means to be a small group.

Permissions: You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material provided that you do not alter it in any way, use the material in its entirety, and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. For web posting, a link to the media on our website is preferred. Any exceptions to the above must be approved by Radical.

Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: By David Platt. © David Platt & Radical.
Website: Radical.net